



Stanford University Medical Center

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305 • (415) 321-1200

OCT 30 1972

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Department of Genetics
Professor Joshua Lederberg

Dear Sarge

I was quite perturbed to see the NY Times story on your brother-in-law Senator Ted Kennedy's blast at Dr Joan Hodgman's clinical experimental work on chloramphenicol at UCLA. And my colleagues share the view that this was uninformed shooting from the hip.

Even if there were some substance to the imputation of misconduct, there is something very close to McCarthyism in this style of ventilation of accusations -- of public pronouncement without a hearing, or even a well defined bill of particulars. Dr. Hodgman will be able to defend herself, but not without having to face a lingering residue of suspicion and confusion. In the long run, the Senator is bound to be polarized by having to defend positions to which he had prematurely committed himself; his own credibility will be impaired -- unless he goes on to an escalating vendetta against medical research; and the kind of clinical study that is the only way we will know the relative merits of different treatments will be seriously frustrated. Of course the moral burden of thousands of lives unsaved for lack of such knowledge can never be fixed to the same political advantage as the unforeseeable risks of those who received an inferior treatment (as known by hindsight!). There will be plenty of plack babies among the unsaved too.

I do not brush aside the problem of how to do 'experiments' without exploiting people. In this case, the 'experiment' was a controlled observation of a set of treatments, each of which had a reasonable rationale. The risk of chloramphenicol fatalities in adults is known to be about 1/30000 cases treated, and this is a good bargain if the drug were as good a potential life-saver as appeared before the study.

LT. JOSEPH P. KENNEDY, JR. LABORATORIES FOR MOLECULAR MEDICINE
dedicated to the study of mental retardation

Molecular Biology Heredity Neurobiology Developmental Medicine